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CAB 301/141

British policy in the Middle East, 1954

E.R.

TOP SECRET.

819

Private
Keep handy.

FP 819

Any proposal to make an arrangement with the Egyptian Government which has no other guarantee except "an element of confidence on both sides" will expose us to serious and valid criticism. It is difficult, especially after what has just happened, to feel any confidence in the Neguib usurpation which has no constitutional, electoral or democratic foundation and rests from day to day upon the convulsive intrigues of a junta of officers using dictorial powers and violent action against each other and against the structure of Government they themselves have set up. Where in this kaleidoscope are we to find a foundation for confidence? The only means which Neguib possesses of preserving his strength, and perhaps his life and liberty, is the policy of driving the British from the Canal Zone and the propaganda of hate against them which is the sole unifying force in Egypt. The quarrel is as necessary to him as the triumph. One cannot therefore feel that his word, unsupported by any factual guarantee, would be of any value. Whatever we give, we give irrevocably. Whatever he promises he can repudiate with undoubted advantage to himself. This also applies to any of his rivals or military successors.

2. The Egyptians have one-sidedly denounced the 1936 Treaty, which was a solemn agreement from which they derived great benefit. What other instrument can be devised of anything like the same authority. But our difficulties with Neguib and similar figures

(February 12, 1953)

will not be confined to Egypt and the Suez Canal. Last year we made an Agreement with Neguib about the Sudan. This endangers sixty years of administrative labour during which great progress had been made. Have the Egyptians kept that Agreement? On the contrary we are now making the case against them that they have flagrantly broken it and have gained the election for a pro-Egyptian Party by their interference and bribery.

3. The recapture of the Sudan by fraud, or if necessary by force, is the Egyptian dream and resolve. What reason is there to suppose that the evacuation of all British troops from Egypt will weaken Neguib's desire to regain the Sudan? It may well encourage him to believe we have only to be maltreated to quit. The fact that the Sudan is his mother-country is the main source of his power in Egypt and was perhaps decisive in his restoration. We should be very credulous if we thought that he and his supporters would abandon these designs because we had completely evacuated Egypt. Confidence is the child of good-will. Whatever we agree to about the Canal Zone Egypt will deny us good-will unless we make a similar submission in the Sudan.

4. Our agreement about the Sudan has been broken. It is now suggested that we should find guarantees for our rights and interests in Egypt by obtaining fresh assurances from Egypt about the Sudan. Why should these

new Sudan assurances on which we are to base our evacuation of the Canal Zone be of any greater virtue or value than those contained in the Agreement concluded only a year ago. On the contrary the continued friction in the Sudan will provide an unending series of incidents to inflame Anglo-Egyptian relations.

5. It may be asked, would it not be better to wash our hands of both Egypt and the Sudan? It would certainly be cheaper, and we could then afford to pay the pensions of the civil servants in the Sudan who have seen their life's work ruined. We must not, however, conceal from ourselves the probability, amounting almost to certainty, that the attempt of Egypt to reconquer the Sudan, and all the preliminary intrigues now on foot for that purpose, will produce a bloody civil war throughout these wide fertile regions for which we have so long held responsibility and acquired an honourable reputation. For us to remain indifferent and impotent to preserve the Sudan from such miseries would bring disgrace upon our country of a kind which would, I think, be very distressing to many of those who have put their faith in us.

6. I trust therefore that we shall search for more solid and effectual guarantees than anything which could be provided by further wordy assurances from Neguib or any other military dictator who may seize power in Egypt.

Monday's Cabinet

1) M: Maclay. 10 Sec.
2) Private Office

10, Downing Street,
Whitehall.

SIR NORMAN BROOK

...

I attach a copy of a minute from the C.I.G.S. It has also been sent to the Foreign Secretary, the Minister of Defence and the Secretary of State for War.

DRC

March 18, 1954

Memo. by C.I.G.S.

COPY

TOP SECRET

War Office,
Whitehall.

PRIME MINISTER

Canal Zone Base

At the end of our talk on Tuesday evening you asked me to ponder over the points we had discussed. I have done so and my conclusions are set out below.

(a) We cannot continue in our present condition. We are getting no return from the immense military resources committed in Egypt, serious damage is being done to the personnel structure of the Army and R.A.F., and our prestige in the Middle East is deteriorating.

(b) Hitherto I have been in favour of an agreement and the latest suggestion of putting the base out to commercial contracts would be preferable to leaving 4,000 soldier-technicians as a probable hostage to fortune. By their actions in connection with the Sudan the present rulers in Egypt have shown that they cannot be relied upon even to try to keep an agreement. Moreover their own future is uncertain and we cannot expect any alternative regime to be more favourable to our interests. The crucial question is whether an agreement would now be worth while.

(c) We have reached a stage at which we must decide on a positive course and see it through.

(d) If it is decided to break off negotiations the course I recommend is to set in motion the plan outlined in the paper C(54)74 dated 27th February which I showed you during our discussion, and to carry it through to the end of Phase III. That would leave us at the end ofabout two years in possession of the area ABU SWEIR - ISMAILIA - PORT SAID, held by some 15,000 troops and a small air force. We should retain an armoured brigade group in Libya and bring the rest of the troops home except for those needed in the Sudan. In that position our forces could be reinforced by air and sea, and we should be free to decide for ourselves whether to withdraw completely or stay on according to the situation at the time. We should not have an effective base, but we would be in possession of an area in which a base could be developed fairly quickly in the event of war. It would be essential for the evacuation of stores and equipment, the contraction of the area we hold, and redeployment to be kept in step as set out in C(54)74, otherwise the security of our forces would be prejudiced, and much valuable property lost.

(e) If there is no prospect of the Sudan agreement being kept by the Egyptians and the present Sudanese government, we should seize the first excuse to reinforce Khartoum with two British battalions, an infantry brigade headquarters,

and a small air force, and resume responsibility for the government of the Sudan.

(f) While we can never make certain of preventing a massacre of British subjects if large scale disorders break out in the Delta, the best way of reducing the risk of such a catastrophe is to cut down the size of the target by taking the most strenuous measures to bring about the departure of those who cannot merge into the local population as soon as trouble threatens. We must always be prepared to carry out a rescue dash on Cairo by a strong mobile column, but we cannot continue to contemplate a major military adventure such as Rodeo which would have no hope of achieving its primary object of preventing a wholesale massacre of British subjects, and which would inevitably lead us into the military re-occupation of the whole of the Delta.

I realise that the course of action I have outlined above may lead us into open conflict with Egypt, but that is a risk we must accept. Failing a workable agreement I believe the plan I have suggested is the only sound policy to pursue from a military point of view. In any case I feel certain we must decide what we are going to do and get on with it.

(Intld.) J.H.

C.I.G.S.

March 17, 1954

Fie

SECRET

FOREIGN SECRETARY

You asked me to let you have, in advance of the minutes of this evening's Cabinet, a note of the basis on which you might approach the Americans about the defence negotiations with the Egyptians.

The proposition which the Cabinet thought you might put to the Americans was this.

We can have no confidence that the present regime in Egypt will honour any agreement made with us. Recent events in the Sudan, and their disregard of the letter and the spirit of the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement on the Sudan, have amply proved the danger of relying on their keeping faith with us. We are therefore very doubtful whether we shall be justified in concluding a defence agreement with them, even though they were willing to accept the whole of our "final terms" as proposed to them in October last. They have indicated, through the United States Ambassador in Cairo, that they would be prepared to make a valuable concession on the "availability" clause (viz., the inclusion of Turkey); but we are likely to find that their price for this is some concession on our part about the status of the British technicians to be left in the Base. We do not feel, after our recent experience, that we could trust the Egyptians to respect the position of a small number of British technicians in the Base, especially if they were denied the protection of British military uniform and personal arms - which would mean that any use of violence against them would be tantamount to an act of war. Therefore, so long as the responsibility for safeguarding the Base rests on British troops, we must insist that their military status should be adequately safeguarded. We would, however, be prepared to consider the alternative proposition that the maintenance of the Base in peace should be entrusted to a civilian organisation, if the Americans were prepared to share this responsibility with us. In that event all British military personnel could be withdrawn from Egypt - though some

arrangement would need to be made for British military inspectors to visit the Base, in plain clothes, from time to time in order to verify that the installations and equipment were being maintained in good order. Would the Americans be prepared to set up, jointly with us, an organisation of civil contractors which would undertake responsibility for the care and maintenance of the Base in time of peace?

From what he said to me after the end of the meeting this evening, I gather that the Prime Minister was still thinking in terms of a series of military moves - in pursuance of his desire for "action rather than words". I wonder, therefore, whether it would not be wise, before you make this approach to the United States Ambassador, to let him know that you are proposing to do so.

NORMAN BROOK

15TH MARCH, 1954.

Fue

PRIME MINISTER

Anglo-American Policy in the Middle East

I have for some time been conscious of a certain inconsistency in our attitude towards American co-operation in the Middle East.

Ever since the war we have wanted the Americans to show greater interest in the Middle East, and we have made various attempts to draw them in. But now that they are at last beginning to take a hand, we get quite cross about the way they do it. We fear that they may supplant us in Persia: we resent their intrusion on our military "sphere of influence" in Iraq: and we do not quite trust them in Egypt.

H.M. Ambassador says (C.(54) 53) that this is causing some bewilderment in Washington. The Americans, he believes, are "inclined to feel that we have cast them for a supporting role, which is to consist of switching on or off the powerful current of their diplomatic and financial influence at a word from us". I am not surprised to hear this. To American eyes it must certainly appear that all we want of them is that they should use their strength to bolster up our position in the Middle East.

All this might have been avoided if, soon after the war, we had offered to work out a joint Anglo-American policy towards the Middle East. It is not, I think, a question of carving out exclusive spheres of influence - e.g., we will leave you free in Saudi Arabia if you will keep out of Iraq, and so on. Rather, it is a problem of finding means of supporting one another throughout the Middle East. Thus, we are at last fumbling our way towards such a partnership on Middle East oil - for we see the political advantages of an arrangement by which both British and American oil companies would be operating in each of the oil-producing countries. Would it not be possible to extend the same sort of conception to the military and political problems of the Middle East? We ought to be able to reach agreement with the Americans on our common aims and objectives in the Middle East, and on the policies best designed to maintain our joint Anglo-American influence in this part of the world.

I believe that it would be valuable if politico-military talks could be held in Washington over the whole range of Middle East problems - political, military and economic - with a view to reaching a common understanding on Anglo-American policy towards the Middle East. H.M. Ambassador and the Head of our Joint Staff Mission could initiate these talks with representatives of the State Department and the Pentagon. If progress were made in these preliminary exchanges, matters could be carried further at a later stage in discussions between Ministers.

If you think well of this suggestion, you may care to put it to the Cabinet. The message from H.M. Ambassador, which has been circulated as C.(54) 53, might perhaps serve as a basis for a Cabinet discussion of this problem.

FEBRUARY 18, 1954

(Signed) NORMAN BROOK

TOP SECRET

FROM : B.J.S.M., WASHINGTON

TO : MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, LONDON

OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE

IZ 776
TOO 272234Z
TOR 280140Z

ELL 731

27th January, 1954

For Chiefs of Staff from Elliot.

Reference COS(W) 387 and my ELL 723.

1. After some difficulty, I saw Radford (since leaving hospital he has been very busy) in a farewell visit this morning and tackled him on the question of the integration of the American policy with American military planning on the lines of your COS(W) 387. Whiteley was present.

2. I started by emphasising that I was making no complaint, or attempting any special pleading. There had been a feeling in London recently, that the US Government had not fully appreciated the importance of the interests both American and British, involved in our dealings with certain Middle East Governments, in relation to the military requirement which we knew that the Americans were seeking in those areas. I reminded him that there had been a conference in May 1952 (of this he had been ignorant) at which, and following which, we had been made aware of certain specific, if tentative requirements which - particularly in the field of air operations - the Americans wished to establish in Cyprus, Libya, the Persian Gulf, Jordan and Iraq.

3. I then quoted the arguments contained in paragraphs 5 and 6 of COS(W) 387. I added that, in the redeployment, which, in due course, would flow from our present negotiations with Egypt, it would need the closest military understanding and cooperation between us to satisfy our joint requirements. Physically, alone, it would be a very tight fit. To achieve this, we would depend on the goodwill of the countries concerned, e.g. Jordan, Iraq and the small Arab States in the Persian Gulf. It was we who were already established in those countries, and we who enjoyed Treaty Rights with them. It was therefore in the interests of the British and of the US to align their policy towards those countries, so that the best joint use could be made of the potential and limited facilities which could be made available. I ended by asking that he (Radford) should discuss the matter with his colleagues in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, inform them of your concern about this matter, and say that it was your wish to be given, through Whiteley, an assurance that the State Department were aware of the size and scope of current American military planning for the Middle East.

4. It was clear that the subject was new to Radford

TOP SECRET

and consequently it was a little difficult to make him realise that all I was seeking was an improvement and better understanding on the part of the Americans of what was involved in our military co-operation in the Middle East. I consequently had to go over the ground more than once with him. Eventually however, he did appreciate what I was saying, and undertook to consult his colleagues.

5. I said that I would be informing the Ambassador of what had taken place between us, and that the latter would, in turn, be speaking to the State Department. On this, Radford volunteered that he, too, would probably speak to Bedell Smith.

6. It was left that the next step should be for Radford to inform Whiteley of the result of his talks with the joint Chiefs of Staff.

7. Later in the morning, I spoke on the same lines to Twining (Whiteley was again present). Twining had a much better knowledge of the subject and promised to give it fair wind at the Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting when Radford raised it. I should, however, add that both Radford and Twining insisted that, as far as they knew, the State Department were fully aware of American Military Plans in the Middle East.

CIRCULATION

TOO 272234Z

War Registry, Admiralty.(for C.N.S.).
C.I.G.S.
C.A.S.
Mr. P.H. Dean.
Mr. P.S. Falla.
Major General Sir J. Sinclair.
D.C.O.R. 'A'.

TOP SECRET

FROM : MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, LONDON

TO : B.J.S.M., WASHINGTON

PRIORITY

OZ 183
TOO 121128Z

COS(W) 387

12th January, 1954.

GUARD For Elliot from Chiefs of Staff

1. For your background information, the foreign policy now being followed by the U.S. Government in the Middle East does not seem to be fully co-ordinated with our own or to take fully into account the importance of preserving certain military facilities which we at present enjoy but which, despite a large measure of military agreement, may be placed in jeopardy through lack of a common Anglo-American policy for the area. Thus, American policy in Egypt over the last two years has encouraged the Egyptians to believe that there is a divergence of view between the United States and the United Kingdom which they can exploit; our position in the Persian Gulf has been made more difficult by the generosity and "softness" of U.S. policy towards Saudi Arabia; and in Iraq the U.S. intention of granting military aid may, by reducing Iraqi dependence on the U.K., lessen our chances of retaining the facilities we enjoy under the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty.

2. At the same time the American military authorities have mentioned over the last two years, following on the Washington conference of May, 1952, tentative requirements for bases and facilities in the Middle East on a scale which indicates that they are engaged in considerable military planning for the area, particularly as regards air forces.

3. The following examples are an indication of what the United States Air Force have said will be their requirements subject to political approval:-

(a) Cyprus In peace. Medium bomber and strategic fighter staging facilities, MATS detachment, POL storage. In war. Post strike staging for 30 bombers, base for 60 strategic fighters, probable base for defensive fighters.

(b) Libya In peace. Full use of WHEELUS, use of IDRIS in conjunction with RAF, hospital, communications centre, POL storage, limited facilities at BENGHAZI or TOBRUK. In war. As in peace, plus large pre and post strike staging requirements at IDRIS.

TOP SECRET

(c) Persian Gulf In peace and war. Strategic bomber base DAHRAN, defensive fighter base BAHREIN, defensive radar SHARJAH and KUWAIT.

(d) Jordan MAFRAQ as alternative to ABU SUEIR for pre and post strike bomber staging up to 120 aircraft per day, strategic fighters and supporting units.

4. The list in paragraph 3 above does not include minor requirements for staging and storage in Aden and Iraq. In addition, the U.S. Navy has stated requirements for the use of airfields by carrier air groups.

5. The provision and sharing of these facilities, which of course impinge directly on us everywhere except at WHEELUS, BENGHAZI and DAHRAN, involves, to a greater or lesser degree, inconveience and embarrassment to us, bearing in mind the problems which will be created by redeployment following an evacuation from Egypt. Provided we receive the facilities we require in Iraq, Jordan and Libya, these inconcveniences are likely to be acceptable in the light of the importance of giving American forces maximum assistance for operating in war. Our ability to afford the Americans the facilities they require may well depend upon the extent to which American foreign policy accords with our own in the Middle East, in particular in facilitating British redeployment.

6. It is difficult to reconcile American political policy with current military planning for the Middle East, and we can only assume that the apparent discrepancy arises from lack of co-ordination between the State Department and the Pentagon. It is of the utmost importance that a joint Anglo-U.S. policy (both political and military) be established for the Middle East area. Apart from the military difficulties that are caused by the lack of such a combined policy, there is also a grave danger that lack of Anglo-American unity of purpose will cause us both to lose facilities in the area which are essential to us both in peace and war.

7. We should therefore like you, after consultation with H.M. Ambassador, to approach the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff and seek an assurance that the State Department is aware of the size and scope of current American military planning for the Middle East.

CIRCULATION TOO 121128Z

War Registry Admiralty (for C.N.S.)
C.I.G.S.
C.A.S.
Mr. P. H. Dean
Mr. P. S. Falla
D.C.O.R. 'A'